Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

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PALM CITY / PALM DESERT COUNTRY CLUB
A history compiled from HSPD Archives
By V. Folkers, Curator

The 1960 brochure read "California's largest retirement community for senior citizens with modest incomes." What 50ish retirement-minded American in their right mind would pass up a deal like this....and starting as low as $12,995. It began with 450 dwellings, homes offering quality and convenience, and advertised with the proverbial *".....homes designed with you in mind!"* Palm City, a place where there was *always* something to do. All country club amenities were promised, including a 9-hole and an 18-hole golf course, heated swimming pools, shuffleboard, horseshoes, roque, a spacious recreation center and an arts and crafts center. There was no other place in the entire world to enjoy all these things on a modest income, and in a wonderful resort climate.

The palm tree lined entrance was just south of a shopping center, restaurant and motel, fronting on Washington Street. The north border ran west along 42nd Avenue with golf course holes 1, 2 & 3 (which would later become holes 12, 13 & 14.) The whole complex eventually formed a lazy-S, spreading south along Warner Trail to 44th Avenue (now Fred Waring), and west to ¼-mile from the Whitewater Wash.

Was there a dark side to this rosy picture? Indeed there was.....sand and wind. The makeup of this acreage was pure sand with minimal plant growth to anchor it in place. A good wind or even a moderate breeze could sand-blast the paint off the front of your car and pit your windshield to the point of needing replacement. Snow fence had to be installed on the north and west sides to control the blowing sand. This created sand dunes and the fence needed to be raised continually. So what convinced a group of men to form the Marnel Development Company and initiate this ambitious project? It was near Palm Springs and Palm Desert, an extension of proven resort areas. It coincided with the completion of Interstate-10, making it only two hours drive from Los Angeles and Orange County.

Groundbreaking ceremonies took place in December of 1960. A Desert Sun photo centering a bulldozer showed county officials George Berkey, Lloyd Loveland and Kay Olesen; project developers Nels Severin and Marshall Secrest, and state real estate commissioner Roger Rolley. The grand opening in Spring of 1961 attracted 10,000 people. By September of that same year, the first unit of 450 homes was almost sold out. Developers planned to pour $30,000,000 into the project over a three-year period on the 560-acre site.

Palm City made its mark in *FIRSTS*; in fact, it was the first retirement community in California. Other firsts included: a central sewage treatment plant, owning and operating their own water company. A central Association operated three swimming pools, shuffleboard, an arts & crafts center and auditorium, reading rooms, and a photo lab.

March 1962 marked the first anniversary of the complex. Homes were already being occupied by 560 people, and nine tenants had signed up for space in the new shopping center. Sales for homes and own-your-own apartments were nearing $10 million. By January of the following year the concept of a self-contained city within the time frame of only two years had been fulfilled. Palm City had attracted more than 1000 adult residents.

A sure sign that people had settled in and were enjoying their new neighbors came at Thanksgiving time in 1963. A turkey dinner was being prepared by Palm City women for 200 at $2.50 per person. There would be dancing to the music of Pat Barbara and his four-piece rhythm band. At that same time a Palm City column by Bess Allen appeared in the Daily News. She reported that Palm City was represented at the seasonal opening of Shadow Mt. Club; they finished the evening around the piano bar at Firecliff Lodge.

Palm City/PDCC (continued)

January 1, 1964 was a landmark date in the history of Palm Desert Country Club. A new partnership was formed and ownership changed hands. Frank Goodman, Dick Farrer, Dick Henderson and Dick Oliphant resigned from Palomar Mortgage Company (owner of Palm City) to become the new owners of "Palm Desert Country Club."

Groundbreaking for Palm Desert's first new clubhouse in nearly a decade took place on October 1, 1966. The $750,000 building would be erected on a rise overlooking the golf course. The 30,000 sq. ft. building would be scheduled to debut in February of 1967. The second floor would house a terraced dining room seating 500 and a cocktail lounge that would accommodate 150.

In October of 1968 PDCC continued to expand its borders to the west on 160 acres. Riverside County eased its restrictions to 6,000 square foot lots. On the new tract 125 homes would be built in the following year, and another nine holes of golf would be added to the present 18-hole course. A brochure published in the 70s touted an 18-hole and a 9-hole executive course, driving range, six tennis courts, pro shop, lounge, dining room, and halfway house (snack bar.) The PDCC library located in the PDCC mall office was closed in the summer of 1978 because the county was short of funds. The PDCC Association decided to move the 3,150 volumes to their clubhouse and operate the library with volunteers.

Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) held a session in February of 1978 to reshuffle sphere of influence boundaries in the mid-valley area. Five Coachella Valley communities were jockeying for changes. As a result of this meeting, PDCC was designated an independent area, free from any city's sphere of influence. In a prior poll, 85 percent of the residents favored this independent status, as their infrastructure was already established.

A drive for annexation began in 1990. Residents hoped to get better police, fire and paramedic services. In mid-1994 PDCC was annexed into Palm Desert, making the city the third largest municipality in the Coachellla Valley. The 1,619-acre annexation area also included Oasis, Woodhaven, Palm Desert Resort, Whitehawk and Desert Breezes. This boosted Palm Desert's population by 36% to 38,596.

A real estate ad in the 8-10-96 issue of the Desert Sun gives the following profile: Originally known as Palm City, when it was built in 1960 as a seniors-only community, the name was changed when the community opened to all age groups. Built by veteran desert developers Dick Oliphant and Frank Goodman as 700-unit tract, there are now about 1,500 homes, five apartment complexes, and a population of 6,000. The community has it own association clubhouse at the intersection of Michigan and California drives, featuring a pool, a rose garden, and meeting rooms for parties and events. House prices range from $75,000 to $190,000. Home owners' association fees are $216 a year for 1,500 members of the association.

Under the Palm Desert umbrella the complex has continued to improve and has resolved some of its traffic problems. In the Fall of 2000 the city built a park in PDCC, which included the city's third dog park. On 5-20-01 the property again changed hands, when Dahoon Investments purchased PDCC for $4.075 million.

Currently a controversy involves a clubhouse renovation; 95 new homes, 65 of which would be built at the site of the driving range (which would be removed); and improvements on both golf courses with installation of a sprinkling system. These measures were approved by the Palm Desert Planning Commission but residents are still debating the issues.

Credits: Some data was taken from an article by Dick Oliphant, April 2002 issue of the PDCC newsletter, "Blast from the Past."

SUMMER DONATIONS

Larry Sundahl – 40 items for the archives, Thunderbird C.C. book

Jean Ernst - 33 items for archives, 8 photos, 1 autographed book "Dear Meg"

Vic Scott – S.R. & S.J. National Monument report

City of Palm Desert – E.I.R. report dated Sept. 2003

Bud Lesser – genealogical and family data

JULIAN "Bud" LESSER
An Autobiography – 4-17-04

No one makes footprints in the sands of time by sitting down; but I got a different understanding of that when I moved here from Los Angeles. It's comfy to sit down in warm sand; but I did know about footprints in my younger years. I was born in San Francisco in 1915. When my father, Sol, moved us to Los Angeles to be a Hollywood producer, I chased his footsteps to learn "movie biz". Over the years I also happily followed vacationers' treks to the desert. Impressed, I stayed. In 1999 I became another Palm Desert full-timer with my wife Helene. We joined this Historical Society and are comfortable here with other desert year-rounders.

My movie steps started in 1940 after college. I made *Massacre River* Guy Madison's first western, *A Saint* with Louis Hayward and Diana Dors, *Whispering Smith Hits London* with Richard Carlson and Herbert Lom, documentaries and short subjects. During World War II, my experience got into the Marine Corps Photographic Section. When television went national in the 1950s, I produced 198 episodes of *Search for Adventure* and *Bold Journey.*

Starting in 1960 I put my film earnings into Hollywood Hills houses I built, rehabbed, and rented. Steep hillsides provide character dwellings with views, and there are no lawns to mow. I leased houses to movie starlets, writers, et al. These people now paid me instead of vice-versa, a refreshing change. I rented to Sonny Bono and Cher when he was a struggling songsmith; in fact, his struggle was so hard he couldn't pay the rent and he had to leave. Years later I spotted him on television in his musical show, clowning around with Cher, dressed like bums and making a fortune. I called his office about the rent he owed me. They paid in full, so Bono credit is still good with me.

During that time my parents owned a winter home in Palm Springs. It was from that location that Dad and I developed the Simmons Ranch land in Indio, which is now the location of Heritage Palms. Later I partnered with Gwynn Wilson, Bert Cavanagh and Tommy Tomson in developing Section 24 on the Palms-to-Pines Highway. We named the subdivision Royal Carrizo, taken from my movie company Royal Productions and Gwynn's half-section on Carrizo Creek. We got involved with the Dunn Road from Hwy. 74 to Cathedral City – it was never finished.

At Royal Carrizo we drilled for water and found it at 650 feet. For protection we drilled another well and installed piping and a water tank atop a hill. This gave us a complete water system; but we charged nothing for the water to owners of our 2-1/2 acre lots. If we charged water fees, the law required us to form a utility company. The cost would have been too much to serve our few customers; besides, free water added desirability to our lots.

One day we saw a well driller on Frank Sinatra's property uphill from us. Via the grapevine we had heard that he was drilling for water without a permit. Wilson and Cavanagh walked up to the work party when Frank was there to ask if he was getting a permit. "Get off my property!" Frank shouted at them. Well, we prudently decided to leave him be. We were trying to attract customers 12 miles up Highway 74, and Frank was an attraction.

I conclude by jumping backward. In 1940 I celebrated New Years Eve at the "B Bar H" Ranch in Garnet with movie agent Carlton Alsop and starlet Martha Scott. It was too soon for ranches to have tennis courts, so we played paddle tennis. Now it's too late for me to run around, so I sit in Coachella Valley institutions: the Historical Society of Palm Desert, the Living Desert, Joslyn Cove Senior Center, and also the Marine Corps League.

In this journey special footprints accompanied mine. I have three adult children, Stephen, Belinda and David Lesser, plus two grandsons and a new granddaughter in 2003. All six are California born.

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Editor's note: Not only has Bud become a HSPD member, but he is currently on the Board of Directors, chairs social events, is a great researcher and docent, and contributes items to our collections on a regular basis. He is one of our more "active" members.

VOLUNTEERS / DOCENTS

After summer vacation, Society headquarters resumed its regular hours starting in September. We are open to the public on Mon., Wed. & Fri. from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. (and) the second and fourth Saturdays each month from noon till 3 p.m. Lois Bradstreet and Pres. Hal Rover work the Saturdays, but we could certainly use a few more volunteers to cover all the weekday hours!!! Please call the office and offer your help.

At the docent meeting on Monday, Sept. 27, it was announced that Society members Jan Holmlund, Jim West, Kay Young and Hal Rover hold positions on the City of Palm Desert's Historical Commission. Various attendees shared their early desert experiences ranging from 1939 through 1966. Callahan, Lesser, Ernst, Rover and the Marmans told their stories. A chronological history of the Society's fire house was distributed. The next meeting will be a visit to the Palm Springs Desert Museum on Friday, Nov. 19th. You are invited to attend.

SCHOOL TOUR PROGRAM RECEIVES GRANT

Thanks to the efforts of our office manager, Anne Tuttle, in early July the Historical Society submitted a grant application to The Lluella Morey Murphey Foundation requesting funds for our school tours. These funds would be used to provide transportation services to and from the Society for local second grade students. On July 29th Mr. Hastings notified us that the Trustees reviewed our application and were happy to award us $3,000 for this project.

The Murphey Foundation is small, and was established over 40 years ago by Mrs. Murphey to provide education and well-being for the younger generation. Although originally based in Pasadena, we are fortunate that the managing trustee, Mr. Alfred B. Hastings, Jr., now resides in Palm Desert and is a great supporter of desert charitable organizations. The Historical Society of Palm Desert is very grateful to The Murphey Foundation for their interest and support of this outreach program to local students.

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MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN OUR MEMORIES

Eleanor Noyes

Eleanor was a faithful member of the Society and one of the pioneers of the Palm Desert area. For many years she was an accountant for various businesses here in the Coachella Valley, including: Desert Air Hotel, Seven Lakes Country Club in Palm Springs, and Shadow Mountain Club in Palm Desert.

Lee Valdez

In 1993 Mr. Valdez was the recipient of the Society's Founders Day award. He worked closely with Cliff Henderson during the formation of Palm Desert, and also with Marian Henderson the founder of Desert Beautiful. We are grateful for the 50 years he worked on building projects integral to our local history.

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NEW MEMBERS

Business:
Shadow Mountain Resort & Club

Roc's Firehouse Grille
(Roland & Jayme Cook)

Contributing:
Lillian Phillips

Individual:
Shirley M. Johnson
Colleen Tebeau

Family:
George & Carol Orendy
Stan & Amanda Maze
Brian & Kelly Holmlund
Sherri Lynn

PALM DESERT 1954 50 2004 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PALM DESERT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Celebrates its 50th Anniversary – October 2, 2004
The Living Desert – 6:30 pm till 9:00 pm

Plan to join the fun with food stations, music, dancing, entertainment, live auction, raffle, door prizes, grand prize, and honoring 50 businesses and individuals who have made a difference in the growth and development of the Chamber of Commerce and the Palm Desert Community. Tickets are $300 per table of 10 – call for reservations at 346-6111

FALL LUNCHEON WITH TED LENNON
Wednesday – October 20, 2004
Shadow Mountain Club

Chairperson Jean Hollenbeck is organizing a wonderful get-together at the historic Shadow Mountain Club for members and guests. Ted Lennon, a developer who has been a major player in the history of Palm Desert, will be our featured speaker. The new Board of Directors for the 2004-2006 term will be installed. You will be receiving an invitation in the mail. Cost is $20 per person.....call 346-6588 for reservations.

New Board of Directors– 2004-2006

President.....Hal Rover	Barbara Eastes	Brett Romer
Vice-Pres.....Dick Folkers	Jean Ernst	Harold Bird
Secretary.....Bonnie Bowie	Don Graybill	Lois Bradstreet
Treasurer.....Helene Harrison	Lyn Manor	Julian "Bud" Lesser
Past-Pres.....Ginny Folkers	Beverly Bergh	Joyce White

MINI-MUSTER – THE FIRE SAFETY PROGRAM

Since the inception of this Historical Society program in 1993 three loyal members have developed it and taken on its administrative tasks each October, which is fire safety month. Jan Holmlund has acted as consultant and done reams of paper work, and Dan and BJ Callahan have been the coordinators. They are retiring; this is their final date of office. John and Madonna Marman have been appointed to serve the Society as the new project coordinators. They understand and appreciate Mini-Muster and look forward to working with all of you. The Society is pleased and fortunate to have the assistance of these two capable and sincere individuals.

Jan, BJ and Dan want to express their thanks for the wonderful years of working with you. Your cooperation, input, and participation has led to the great success of Mini-Muster. These fire safety lessons are eagerly anticipated by every child entering 3rd grade in four of our local schools. The skills they gain last a lifetime and the information they take home spreads throughout the Cove Communities. All of us working together – City of Palm Desert, City of Indian Wells, Riverside County Fire Department, Desert Sands School District, and the Historical Society of Palm Desert – created a program that has and will continue to benefit all our citizens. They share with you their pride in the Mini-Muster program, and thank you for your assistance and kindness to them during the past 12 years.

This year's Mini-Muster schedule:	Tues., Oct. 5 – Washington School	Tues., Oct. 12 – Ford School
(To volunteer call 346-6588)	Thurs., Oct. 7 – Lincoln School	Thurs., Oct. 14 – Carter School

Note: Volunteers are invited to a recognition ceremony hosted by the City of Palm Desert on Oct. 28 at 4:00 p.m.

MEMBERSHIP

John Marman and Dick Folkers, committee co-chairs, ask that you invite others to join the Historical Society. They can't reach their goal of 100 new members in 2004 unless you participate. You can pick up some of our new tri-fold brochures at the office to give to your friends, neighbors, family, co-workers, and business owners.

FALL YARD SALE – October 30 & 31 (Sat. & Sun.)

During the summer our volunteers have amassed quite a collection of treasures for our up-coming yard sale....but we aren't finished yet....we need still more. We will take almost anything, except clothing and shoes. All proceeds will benefit the Historical Society and receipts for income tax purposes are available upon request. Our yard sale will include a boutique booth for more valuable items, so keep that in mind when you talk to your friends.

Mention to people holding local yard sales that the Society would be happy to pick up their left-overs. You may drop off saleable items at the fire house on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. till 3 p.m. (or) leave a message at 346-6588 if you would like us to pick up your donations.

Notes of Interest:

- The Desert Beautiful office closed during the summer. Some of the contents were put in storage, some were taken by the Society for use at their headquarters for exhibiting, and some were put into the yard sale.
- Liz Fico, a photographer from the Desert Sun, took pictures at Society for the Snapshots section on Sept. 21st.
- Work on the archives has continued throughout the summer months. One of the largest tasks has been the sorting of Cliff Henderson's work, resulting in thousands of documents for Collections #36 and #111.

SALTON SEA
History Tells the Story

The Gulf of California extended beyond Palm Springs several million years ago. At a later prehistoric age, the Colorado River built a delta bar creating a salt water lake which eventually evaporated. Lake Cahuilla was made by the flooding of the Colorado River centuries ago. This fresh water lake also eventually evaporated. The Salton Sea as we know it today was formed by the flood of 1905-1907. The Sea's salt content is approximately 25% greater than ocean water.

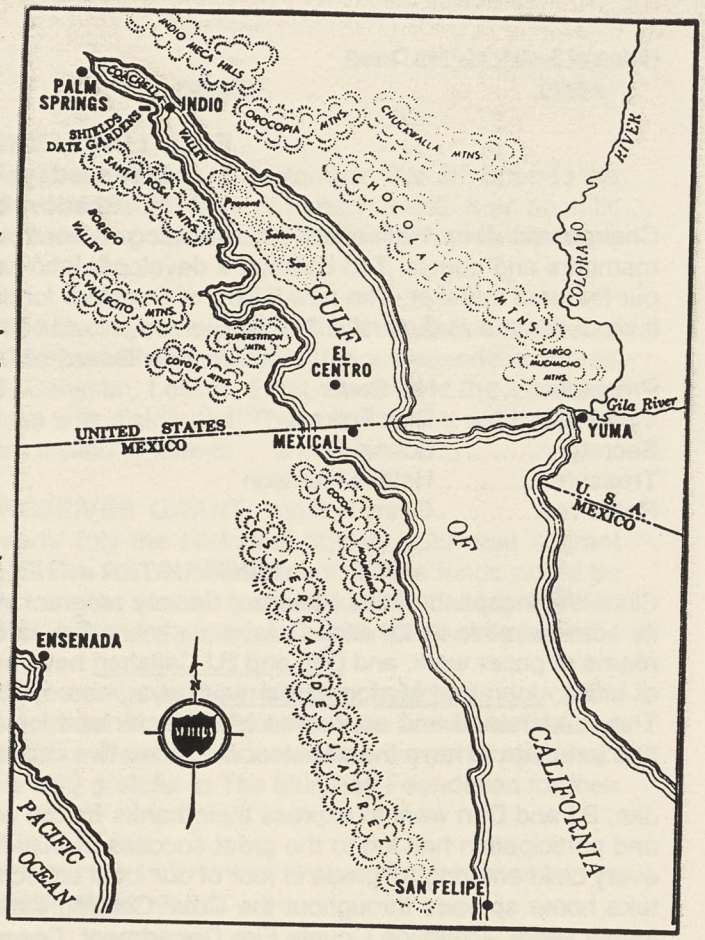
(Note: Above information/illustration courtesy of the Salton Sea Authority)

The Story Continues.....
Man's Intervention

When the farmers in Imperial Valley needed water for their winter crops, California Development Company dug a canal from the Colorado River. In 1904 silt blocked it so they dug another one to by-pass the blockage. The intention was to fill them in before the Spring rains, but that year the rains came in December. By April the channels had gone from 50' to 800', and by 1905 they widened to 4,000', forming the Salton Sea.

(Note: Gleanings from Dr. Ralph Pawley's history of Coachella Valley, courtesy of Theresa Pawley)

Editors: Ginny Folkers & Bud Lesser



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